

Children and Civic Society: Italian and Norwegian Children and Youth Perception and Participation in Civic Events Related to Life Transitions

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This paper reports on two research studies on children and civil society in Italy and Norway. By civil society we mean a collective celebration of civic engagement, people's connections with and participation in the life of their communities (Putnam, 1993). The first study reports on children's participation in community events in Modena, Italy which mark their completion of preschool (a concert in the main square) and elementary school (a "Sports School" in a large park). In Norway the main focus of the celebration of constitution day on May 17 is on elementary school children who practice songs, marching, and playing of instruments for their participation in parades in the city centers of large cities and small towns. After the parades the children return to their schools with their parents to participate in games, competitive activities, and general communal festivities. Older youth finishing high school (*Russ*) participated in a series of activities and events beginning on May 1 which mark their completion of formal schooling. The period of celebration culminates the evening of May 16 with overnight parties in city centers and then the *Russ* design and participation in their on parade on May 17th. In these two studies we observed and interviewed both children and youth regarding their perceptions and participation in these civic celebrations. In the paper we discuss how children and youth through their collective participation with peers, parents, siblings, and teachers develop clear conceptions about their futures and acquire adaptive skills for making important transitions in their lives. We also discuss how the children and youth develop attitudes of civic attachment and pride in being active citizens of their particular cities and countries.

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